

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London, SW1A 2AA

26th May 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

RE: Tea, Smiles and Empty Promises

The 31st May 2021 marks ten years since a BBC Panorama programme shook the nation when it revealed the horrific abuse and mistreatment of people with a learning disability and/or autism at Winterbourne View, an 'Assessment and Treatment Unit' near Bristol.

We, families of some of the former patients of Winterbourne View, write to you today at this significant milestone, as we reflect on the past ten years in circumstances far from those we expected, or hoped for, as we watched the dreadful scenes unfold that night.

Ten years ago, we imagined that abuse and mistreatment of our family members and their peers exposed that night, and the national outcry that followed, would spur change. We dared to hope that the reports, proposals, reviews and investigations that followed would result in progress.

Today instead, countless other families have experienced, and continue to experience, the same trauma at the hands of the system. Our loved ones, and an increasing number of others, continue to face the reality that not even the exposure in the media of their torture has been sufficient motivation for government and the NHS to change a broken system.

There has been a series of failures to 'transform care' for those with a learning disability and/or autism in, or at risk of entering, similar services. A succession of missed deadlines, and broken promises, 10- years of pushing-back expectations at unimaginable human cost, all too easily ignored by those with the power to effect change.

Today still, **over 2000 people remain locked in inpatient units at risk of abuse, and mistreatment.**

These hospitals are outdated and pose inherent social, emotional and physical risks to those who enter through their doors. They are simply the wrong model of care:

- **The average length of stay for current inpatients with a learning disability and/or autism is more than five and a half years.**
- **Many are isolated and lonely far from their homes, their communities and their loved ones.**
- **Shockingly, 355 people have been in these units for more than 10 years.**
- **People continue to be admitted to these places that are meant to be reducing their capacity. There have been 9,490 admissions since March 2015.**
- **Since October 2018, children and adults with a learning disability and/or autism in inpatient units have been subjected to at least 102,010 restrictive interventions.** This is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg of mistreatment, as most units fail to submit data.¹

Since 2011, numerous further abuse scandals have occurred in inpatient units across the UK. With each of these, other families join us as broken bystanders to a 'care system' failing in its most basic aim.

Our family members are traumatised by their experiences. The continued missed targets and extended deadlines, only serve to add to their pain.

In 2019, Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into the detention of young people with learning disabilities and/or autism stated: *"We regard ourselves as a civilised society with a respect for human rights...but the brutal truth is that we are failing to protect some of the most vulnerable young people - those with learning disabilities and/or autism. And indeed, we are inflicting terrible suffering on those detained in mental health hospitals and causing anguish to their distraught families."*

This is an issue that was urgent ten years ago, and is no less so today. The government must end this model of care, improve community support and services to avoid crises, and help those already traumatised by the failures we too commonly see.

Attached with this letter is a collection of stories of only some of the families impacted. Far from being exceptions to the rule, these stories are overwhelmingly frequent and devastatingly real. They are the stories of the people we, and others, love.

We ask that you respond to this letter and to the actions we recommend with a commitment to the real, enduring change that this issue needs, and deserves:

- **The cross-government action plan that the government committed to in the wake of the Joint Committee on Human Rights report must be published.**

¹ All data references can be found in the report: Tea, Smiles and Empty Promises, attached and at this link: www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/news/winterbourne-view-10-years-on

- **Within this, and throughout the system, there must be a strong focus on preventing admission, and on supporting those people and families who have faced the destructive trauma caused by the failures of the system to date.**

For the sake of our family members, and all others facing this system today, the change must happen. There must be an end to the inhumanity our loved ones have faced, once and for all.

You have personally made a commitment to the nation of “levelling up”- but for this group of people this is nowhere near a reality and their basic human rights continue to be violated. It is our greatest hope that we will someday soon reflect on the liberty, wellbeing and lives of people saved, instead of lost.

Yours sincerely,

Families of former residents of Winterbourne View:

Ann Earley, Mother of Simon
Wendy Fiander, Mother of Kayleigh
Lorretta, Mother of Dan
Steve Sollars, Father of Sam
Claire Garrod, Mother of Ben
Emma Austin-Garrod, Sister of Ben
Leslie Bonner, Father of Leslie Jr.
Anonymous, Parents

cc. Rt. Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Helen Whately MP, Minister of State for Care